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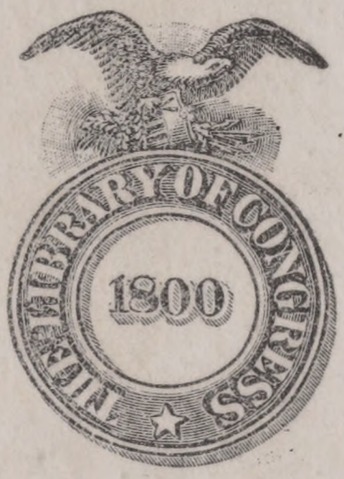

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Wilson or the Kaiser

from the story
by
Maxwell Karger

Novelized by Janet Priest

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WILSON

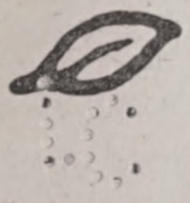
OR

The KAISER?

A NOVEL OF TO-DAY

After the Story by

MAXWELL KARGER



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WILSON OR THE KAISER?

CHAPTER I

Lad's Love

All his life Conrad Boehm had loved little Vilma Liebrecht. Ever since the days when he used to ride her on his sled, in the glorious snow of a crisp, cold winter, and taking off her mittens, warm her hands between his own, his heart had gone out to her in a great wave of love and longing, which now, a man grown, he had only recently begun to understand.

"Forget-me-not," he often called her, and it was as a forget-me-not that he often thought of her. She was so sweet, so appealing, as her dear blue eyes followed him about. "Forget-me-not," he had murmured, thinking aloud, when he left their little suburb to go away and study at the *gymnasium*. *"Vergiss-mein-nicht!"*

And Vilma, in sweet misunderstanding, had made reply, "No, Conrad, I won't. I will never forget you."

He dared not tell the other lads of his age about Vilma. They would have jeered and hooted at him for a "softie." A true German youth must not be a "softie." He must think only of his Kaiser and his "Gott,"—true, the Kaiser came first, in this strange land.

So Conrad Boehm's first love-notes were limited to such expressions as: "I am well. I hope you are well. Your sincere friend, Conrad." Besides, under the rigid discipline of the schools, the youth became more and more martial, more and more hypnotized by the idea of German supremacy and the destiny of the great German nation. *"Deutschland über alles,"* and the Kaiser *"über Deutschland,"* was his ideal. And trusting little Vilma, herself the daughter of a soldier, would have echoed the sentiment as being the holiest a subject of the Imperial Government could entertain.

But far away across the sea, in that golden land of America, lived Conrad's cousin Albert, born in the same year, like him in the vigor of sturdy youth, but wholly unlike him in training and habits of thought. Albert had never been taught to believe that the United States must rule the world. If the truth were known, his thoughts were principally of baseball—and of dark-eyed Kitty Blake. Not that he would have dared to tell her so, or even admit it to himself.

"You play a smashing good game of tennis—for a kid," was the nearest to a compliment that she had ever received from him. But Kitty only shook her dark curls and smiled—Kitty knew.

It was not until Albert went to Princeton that he began to show a real interest in anything wider in scope than the "world's series." At Princeton he began to think, led by the example of a master-mind, the simple, unostentatious "Prexy," who smiled at him in greeting when they happened to meet on the campus.

"Why, do you know," he unburdened himself

to Kitty and her mother, on the Blakes' porch, one evening, "he's got the bulliest ideas, that Prexy of mine. Makes a fellow glad to be alive in the same world with him, sort of following along and thinking his thoughts after him."

Mrs. Blake laughed gently. "Oh, you don't need to press-agent Woodrow Wilson to this family. I went to Bryn Mawr, remember. He taught me all I know of political science—and a good deal about a sane viewpoint on life."

"Well, he's put his ideas in practice by doing a lot for us undergrads," continued Albert. "He's going to run for Governor, and I'm willing to bet good coin of the realm that he wins that or anything else he wants to undertake."

"So am I," said Mrs. Blake. "Though I don't think he wants much for himself. He has some high-minded ideas about altruism."

"I don't know what you're talking about," interrupted Kitty, coming out of the house with some sort of tulle arrangement about her head, "but I am *entirely* ready to go to the Holworthy dance. I've been resting up for it all day."

"So glad I feel strong this evening," laughed Albert. "Come along, and I'll tell you my important news on the way over."

"Fact is," he confided, as they passed under the trees, "dad has had a run of luck and given me my choice of anything I want for a birthday present. I chose that trip to Germany I've always wanted to make to see my relatives. My cousin Conrad is just my age, you know, and we've corresponded always. He has learned English, and I've learned German, and we alternate languages in the letters. At first he wanted me to

correct him when he made mistakes, but by now he writes as good English as I do. It's kept me up to the mark being an example to Cousin Conrad."

"When do you go?" asked Kitty.

"Next summer, just as soon as college is out. I want the benefit of the whole three months."

"Well," said Kitty, "I have visions of myself being a porch wren this summer, with no one to talk to."

Albert laughed. "You! Any time! I only wish I believed it! But here is where Jim Dennison will get in his innings."

"Any time!" repeated Kitty scornfully. No sentimental love-words these, but they warmed the hearts of this young man and maid. Each knew that the other would wait patiently and loyally, even if seas should divide them.

CHAPTER II

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

To Conrad's home, to Munich, went Albert, and the two cousins had glorious times together. In Munich Albert found another Montmartre, another Washington Square. There he saw the free—somewhat too free—life of the art students, the bobbed hair of the girls and the flowing ties of the men giving slight indication of the larger revolt against conventions. Albert was a healthy-minded youth, and the pale immoralities here did not appeal to him. Rather he preferred the more natural life of the animals in the *Thiergarten*. "Always did love a circus," he said.

He was delighted with Vilma Liebrecht, to whom Conrad rather shyly introduced him. "Say, isn't she the appealing little thing!" exclaimed Albert. "Makes you think of a flower, somehow—a flower that won't stand the storm. She's a little queen, old chap. But, say——" In a burst of confidence he showed his cousin a snapshot of Kitty Blake in tennis costume. "Some girl!" was his only comment. But Conrad understood.

The land of *Kultur* held many fascinations for Albert—principally because he could not understand it. The German process of reasoning, the German point of view, left him baffled.

"The Kaiser says—the Kaiser thinks—don't you Germans ever do any of your own thinking?"

he expostulated one day.

"Certainly," replied the youth, warmly loyal to his Fatherland. "Nietzsche has thought, Treitschke has thought, the Kaiser has thought—but we all think the same—*'Deutschland über alles.'*"

"How curious!" commented Albert. "I really believe you mean it. You make men of less importance than the state. Hearts and souls aren't as big to you as the material things. The glory of the Kaiser's sword is the greatest thing in the world to you Germans. Well, I don't know what kind of a man your Kaiser must be to permit it. I should think he would be ashamed to look the humblest of you in the face."

"Don't speak so of the *Allerhöchste Person!*" gasped Conrad. He was truly shocked. Besides, he was painfully afraid some one in authority might overhear his cousin's utterances. "Naturally, the state matters more than any of us, or than all of us put together."

"Now I don't agree with you, Conrad," said Albert, in straightforward American fashion. "And there's a whole nation across the water that doesn't agree with you, either. I wish you could just hear my Prexy talk. At least, he used to be Prex—he's Governor of New Jersey now. Say," he exclaimed, in an outburst of enthusiasm, "he's just the greatest man in the world!"

"Except the Kaiser," said Conrad.

"Kaiser or no Kaiser," insisted Albert. These two youths were violently partisan in their hero-worship.

But Conrad, being a good student, was anxious to be informed about this man across the seas

who had so won his cousin's admiration. "What are the ideas of this Wilson?"

"Well, in a way," began Albert, launching forth happily on his pet subject, "there is a similarity in the two men we've been talking about, in this respect: Each seems to be the mouthpiece of his nation. Germany stands for *Kultur* as the bulwark of the state, and the Kaiser expresses that. America, since the very moment of her birth"——and Albert threw out his chest in happy pride——"has stood for the rights of humanity. Wilson expresses *that*. I tell you, that man will go far, but never for his own sake. Always it will be for the sake of an ideal."

"Ideals butter no bread," objected the German lad.

"Now you're talking like a materialist—like the Kaiser," said Albert. "And that just goes to show the difference. We believe in right for its own sake. And you believe that might makes right. But that is only what you've been taught, Conrad, I can see that plainly. Underneath, you are just as idealistic as any American—as Lafayette was—as Wilson is. I can tell that by the way you look at Vilma."

"*Vergiss-mein-nicht,*" muttered Conrad.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing." Conrad reddened.

"Well, if you're like that, there must be other Germans like you. And some time your Kaiser is going to be in for a great old awakening."

"Oh, you mustn't say such things. It's *'Verboten.'*"

Albert threw back his head and laughed merrily. "*'Verboten.'* Of course, you poor fish,

everything that's any good in this *Kultur-land* of yours is *'Verboten.'* Well, you're a good kid, and awfully kind to your mother, and I hope you get along. I only wish all Prussians were like you."

"We are all loyal to the Emperor," insisted Conrad.

"Of course you are. It's *'Verboten'* to be anything else," teased Albert. "But wasn't he the gabby party in that interview to the *Telegraph* three years ago? And how about the Agadir affair? Wasn't that a blunder—even if the Kaiser did do it?"

"England has been trying hard to get us into trouble. The Kaiser can do no wrong," stoutly protested Conrad.

"All right, have it your own way. But I wonder if you'll say the same ten years from now." In how much shorter a time than that was the whole world to learn the truth about the "Peace-Lord," who, unmasking, would throw off his disguise and come forth shamelessly as a King of Battles and of Wanton Destruction!

For the remainder of Albert's visit the two boys avoided the subject on which their ideas were so hopelessly opposed, and they enjoyed themselves as only two healthy young creatures can who have not a care in the world.

After the young American had gone, Conrad often thought over his strange utterances. Generally he stoutly refused admittance to such "notions"—the idealistic teachings of the "man named Wilson, a college professor, a mere teacher." But sometimes they found an answering echo even in his faithful heart—especially when he looked at flaxen-haired Vilma. Then came

the time for his military service. And in the iron rule and rigid discipline of those three years the visions of the "man Wilson" and the impracticable ideas of America, "the great experiment," were forgotten.

CHAPTER III

"These Young Folks"

A NEW emotion now made itself felt in Conrad's simple nature, for Vilma's letters contained frequent references to a wonderful *"Her Leutnant"*—Ernst von Bohnen. Not that she cared anything about him or the flowers he sent, but her old father was pleased and flattered that his daughter should have attracted the attention of so *wohlgeboren* a suitor. However, Ernst von Bohnen would have smiled at the thought of marriage with a girl beneath him socially. Eyes, no matter how blue, could not buy the gold lace for the future uniforms of his overweening ambition, and he had already decided that the scornful young heiress, Hertha Kleist, should have that privilege. In the meantime, flaxen hair and blue eyes were charming as a pastime.

Conrad felt an unrest for which he could ascribe no sufficient reason. He was not jealous—only vaguely apprehensive. In some ways he had almost the intuition of a woman. But setting his firm young jaw and straightening his shoulders, he tried to forget his forebodings, as daily he drilled and "goose-stepped" with his comrades.

When Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, in response to the demand of an idealistic people, Albert Brown was the happiest

young man in the world.

"Why, it just seems too good to be true!" he told Kitty.

"Goodness, I didn't know you took such an interest in politics, Albert," was the girl's surprised answer.

"Politics, no! But Wilson, yes! I always told you that man would be heard from. With his constructive idealism——"

"Careful, there," she laughed. "Those are pretty big words."

"Well, we're a pretty big nation. And with this man to lead us, we'll all be thinking big thoughts before we're through. See if we're not!"

"But, Albert, I always thought you were a Republican."

"I always thought so, too. Then I became a Wilson Republican. And now I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I follow this man wherever he leads. I don't believe I could do better."

Albert was delighted at the firm hand the new President took in the matter of the currency reform—and grinned happily to himself at his determination in whipping Congress into line.

"Stubborn! Of course he is," he said, in answer to a teasing remark of Kitty's. "But you don't accomplish anything worth while in this world without being stubborn. I'm stubborn myself on one subject, young lady. And when I've graduated and shown that I can make my way as an architect, I'm going to ask you if it's going to do me any good—I mean—I mean——" He floundered in the usual manner of the average American male youth trying to bare his inmost

secrets. "Oh, you know what I mean."

"Of course I do, stupid! Haven't I been refusing invitations from every one else for months?"

He thought it over. It was true—she had. Oh, the wonder that was woman! He caught her hand and gripped it awkwardly, but she tore away from his grasp and ran into the house. And Albert took himself off down the tree-bordered walk, happy as a king.

CHAPTER IV

A WORLD DISHONORED

HOWEVER, kings are not always happy. In the beginning of that year of our Lord, 1914, Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, was far from happy. He was certain that he was the greatest man and the greatest Emperor who ever sat on a throne. Why, then, did he not have a kingdom to correspond? Why should Germany be so confined geographically? His people demanded room to grow in, his ministers demanded war, he himself demanded nothing less than world dominion, so that all should bow down and worship before him. A way must be found—a pretext for declaring war, since the attempt at Agadir had failed. After that, the rest would be easy, for had they not been preparing for many years for "The Day"?

Was not the Imperial army invincible, and was not the navy, the pet of the nation, the creation of "Tirpitz the Eternal"—a glorious assemblage of dreadnoughts? England must be put in her place. Why wait?

But caution counseled a delay until they could appear to be in the right. An opening wedge must be made among the Central Powers, and with true Prussian cowardice—for a Prussian fears to fight an equal foe—the weakest nation of all was chosen to bear the blow. Little Serbia was selected

by "meinself und Gott" to be the place of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his consort by a crazy revolutionist, and care was taken that the demand for reparation and revenge should be couched in such an insulting way as not to be borne.

Nothing Serbia could have said or done could have wiped out the injury of Sarajevo, for to the Central Powers it was not an injury. Franz Ferdinand was sacrificed to the lust for ambition of his own nation and the haughtier nation dictating terms to it just as surely as Christ was sacrificed on the cross that the truth He taught might live. But Franz Ferdinand's, unlike that Other's, was a cause foredoomed. Conceived and born in selfish cruelty, it was to live its horrid term, a misshapen, monstrous thing, and die a death as horrible.

True, the Austrian heir-apparent had been the friend of Wilhelm, but what is a friend more or less when world dominion is the prize coveted? His death would bind to Wilhelm with hoops of steel the man who had always feared him, who had twice tried to get rid of him, Francis Joseph, Emperor of the nation to the southward.

Franz Ferdinand sacrificed, the gage was thrown down—Germany threw off the mask! The Kaiser renounced his adopted rôle of "the Peace Lord," and for the first time showed himself to the world for what he was, a Man of Battles, a war-mad spirit! On the east Germany struck out spitefully, pretending that Russia was ready to take up arms against her; on the south she rushed to aid her sister in guile, Austria; and on the west, hoping for a quick route through France to Eng-

land, she sped to ravage peaceful Belgium, committing crimes that in the annals of all history stand unchallenged in their monstrosity.

And these were the commands of Wilhelm, transmitted through his faithful officers to men who had been carefully trained not to think, but merely to obey. For those crimes not those poor, fear-driven creatures, of scarcely more intelligence than the beasts of the field, shall be judged, but that brilliant, dominating, egotistical War-Lord, whose commands his soldiers have not known other than to obey. What new punishment, more subtle and more potent than any yet known to man, will the High Judge of Mankind devise to bring that proud nature to its knees?

Forth marched the armies of the Kaiser to conquest, all its man-power sent to gratify the ambition of its heads for "a place in the sun." How different from the ideals of that great American who has declared himself for the rights of peoples rather than for the rights of governments! Who later, after careful deliberation and prayerful thought, called attention to "the menace and the actual power of a vast military establishment controlled by an irresponsible Government which, having secretly planned to dominate the world, proceeded to carry the plan out without regard either to the sacred obligations of treaty or the long-established practices and long-cherished principles of international action and honor; which chose its own time for the war; delivered its blow fiercely and suddenly; stopped at no barrier either of law or of mercy; swept a whole continent with the tide of blood—not the blood of soldiers only, but the blood of innocent women and children

also, and of the helpless poor; and now stands balked but not defeated, the enemy of four-fifths of the world."

Conrad Boehm went to war happy. His blood sang in his veins. For was not Vilma Liebrecht's kiss on his lips, her promise in his heart, and her hastily plucked flowers stuck gaily in the muzzle of his rifle?

And war was a man's game. Poetical dreamings were all well enough, but there was something real about marching off like this, to do battle "for country and for Kaiser." In a month they would be in Paris. He would bring back something pretty for Vilma, and then they would be married. The war would be over, and they could spend their days in peace. But first—the glory of the battlefield. Oh, it was good to be a man, and a German! Albert, now, and his peaceful-minded professor-president across the sea, what did they know of real living?

But what did they mean, those Belgians, by standing firm? Did they not realize it was the Kaiser's *will* to sweep through to France, and thence to England? A treaty? Poof! what were treaties? Mere "scraps of paper," to be kept as long as expedience warranted. That was the express teaching of Frederick III. How much has his soul to answer for where it languishes!

Very well, if these Belgians withstood with force, give them force in return! Burn, hew down, ravage, butcher! "Those that take the sword shall perish by the sword." Quote Scripture to them. If the devil can quote Scripture for his purpose, why not the Kaiser? Give the soldiers drink, sound the war-alarm on the trump-

ets, put hell into the souls of the men, that hell shall reign on earth! Make war as frightful as possible. It is the Kaiser's express command.

Somehow—unaccountably—the joy went out of Conrad Boehm's heart. What was the matter? Had he not been trained and "goose-stepped" sufficiently? But surely this was not war, thought Conrad. These were not the gallant deeds of which he had dreamed. Fighting a foe in the open —some glory in that. But a mad scramble after defenceless girls, breaking into wine-cellars and drinking one's self insensible, sticking bayonets into babies and old women as if they were so many pigs, all in the name of the Kaiser, this was not war. If his *Herr Leutnant* could have seen into Conrad's mind at that moment, he would have been shot on the spot. That *Leutnant* was Ernst von Bohnen.

"Well," said Conrad to himself, "there's one good thing. He's here where I can watch him!" And on he swung with his regiment, further and further into the horrors of a war "made in Germany." France, that brave spirit among the nations, and sturdy England, came to the rescue, and the forces of blood-lust and humanity were locked in a death-struggle.

Across the Atlantic, Kitty Blake's busy fingers were making garments for the stricken Belgians and Serbians, and her mother was engrossed in organizing relief societies. Wounded humanity appealed strongly to the women, and the attention of many men was first called to what was going on by the unusual demands made on their pocket-books in the relief work.

A "pal" of Albert Brown's took hurried leave

of him before going to Canada to enlist.

"Don't you think you're a bit speedy, George?" asked Albert. "Seems to me it will be time enough when our own country goes into the fight. This thing that some of you fellows are doing looks to me like a distinct rap at the president for not declaring war on Germany."

"I don't mean it that way, Albert, old skate. The president is anxious to see whether a final breach can be avoided. He's got the whole country to think of. But I've got just myself, and I know where my duty lies. A man generally gets just about one chance to do a really big thing—I figure that this is my chance."

Six months later a list of Canadian wounded on the Western front included the name of George Downing, American. The U-boat victims had increased in number, and the methods of German warfare in "frightfulness." Poisoned gas had put in its appearance. Albert began to wish with all his heart that the patient man in the White House would decide to join the Allies.

CHAPTER V

THE MARTYR FALLS

ERNST VON BOHNEN was a true "Kaiser mann" —the type the Kaiser had always admired. In addition to riding well and shooting straight, he was admirably informed on all the current topics of the day, and he had made a hobby of medicine. He had never taken any degree in medicine, preferring to adopt his ruler's attitude of a learned amateur. That may have been the reason why he paid an unusual amount of attention to the hospitals of Brussels, in which city his regiment was quartered, and especially to that hospital in which a frail Englishwoman labored day and night, with the utmost skill of her calling, to allay the sufferings of the wounded.

To that hospital Conrad Boehm was brought, with a Belgian bullet in his shoulder. And there he came to know the tender ministry of Edith Cavell, and of pretty little Amy, with cheeks like the apple-blooms of her native England. As he lay there helpless but for the care of these noble women, they often reminded him of Vilma in their gentleness. He thanked God that Vilma was far away from the scenes he had witnessed and in which he had taken unwilling part since he had marched away with her flowers in his musket.

One day when Amy came to change the dressing of his wound the tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Was fehlt dir, kleine?" asked Conrad. "What is the matter?"

She glanced around, as if in fear, to make sure no one was listening. "The General—I'm afraid. Louise is gone, and now I——"

"What's the trouble? Isn't Nurse Cavell satisfied with your work?"

"Oh, that isn't it. I'm too pretty." She said it simply, without coquetry. "I wish I had had small-pox. Von Bissing——" she began, but stopped suddenly, as the *"Herr Leutnant"* came to learn the condition of Boehm, who was one of his sharpshooters.

Apparently, he did not even see her, but nothing ever escaped Ernst von Bohnen's eagle eyes. Next day Amy was succeeded by a plainer girl, equally skilful—von Bissing had been robbed of his toy. The next time Lieutenant von Bohnen visited the hospital, he noted Amy's absence, and asked for Nurse Cavell.

"Where is your little assistant who was doing so much for my wounded friend here?" he asked.

"She was suddenly taken ill," was the calm answer of Nurse Cavell, as she looked steadily into his eyes.

"Sudden illness is sometimes fatal—in war times," was his cryptic answer. And Edith Cavell knew that her time had come.

Lieutenant von Bohnen raised himself high in the estimation of his commanding officer by his speedy report on the escape of a Belgian and a British soldier. Nurse Cavell, it appeared, had been using her sacred office as a cloak for the aid of enemies to His Majesty and the Imperial German Government. The punishment for such a

crime was death. It mattered little that Nurse Cavell knew the real crime for which she was being sentenced—aiding innocent girls to escape from the clutches of war-lords. The Kaiser had refused to interfere with the "recreation" even of his common soldiers. Edith Cavell must die!

Conrad Boehm dared to speak a word of pity for the woman who had nursed him back to strength.

"Kerl!" said von Bohnen. "You forget yourself!" For penalty he was ordered to take his place in the firing-squad, one of the six men representing the six regiments quartered there.

"You admire Nurse Cavell, an enemy to the Fatherland," he sneered. "Very well. It will be your privilege to assist her toward an easy death."

As she stood there in the gray dawn, the stone wall at her back, more than one of the six waiting for the *Herr Leutnant's* sharp order to fire thought of the loftiness of the spirit with which she had tended not only the prisoners of her own nation, and of the Belgians among whom she had cast her lot, but also the men of their own number, the all too brutal conquerors of the Belgians. To her, they had all been God's children, and as such she had given them of her skill. But the implacable demands of a brutish over-lord, balked of his prey, must be obeyed.

The *Herr Leutnant* gave the command—six rifles barked loudly. Edith Cavell fell dead.

Her face was calm as she lay there—she seemed to be at peace. Ernst von Bohnen felt somehow baffled. He felt that this dead woman was in some subtle way laughing at him. How dared she—perfect example of Prussian militarism that

he was! With a snarl of hate, he emptied all six shots of his revolver into the frail form that no longer quivered. Arch-stupidity of *Kultur!*

Conrad lingered, amazed to see his usually imperturbable superior officer so shaken out of his reserve; then saw him, in further desecration of the dead, stoop and tear off a piece of the woman's dress as a souvenir, that he might prove to his fiancée, when he went home on furlough, what a great man he was. Von Bohnen rose. Directly above him, several inches from the spot where Nurse Cavell's serene head had been offered as a target, was a bullet-hole. One of the men had fired wide of the mark. Every man Jack of them was a dead shot. It had been intentional. Private Boehm, now——

Catching von Bohnen's eye, and realizing that he was suspected, Conrad dashed out of the open gate and up the street like mad. Von Bohnen cursed his own idiocy for having fired all his shots at a dead woman. He summoned the guard, and his own comrades fired after Boehm's retreating, constantly dodging, figure. Conrad was wounded, but not seriously, and succeeded in finding shelter in an old cellar. He managed to obtain a change of clothes, and escaped from the city by night. After several days he finally reached Berlin—and Vilma.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

In years to come, our children's children will find it hard to believe that there once lived a nation which deliberately, of its own free will (or that of an insane Kaiser), stepped back into the ooze and slime of centuries gone, and all in the name of *Kultur* became lower than the beasts. The "abomination" of Revelation has come to pass! Even the primitive passion of the brute is honorable and holy compared to the unnatural cruelty of the mandate of the Kaiser to repeople his Empire.

News of the royal proclamation in regard to unmarried women had reached Vilma Liebrecht. She was supposed, like the others, to "do her duty," and bear future soldiers for the Kaiser's army. The proclamation had been sent to the men remaining at home, and to the soldiers at the front. Instructions were explicit as to their duty when they returned home on furlough. These are simple facts, and future readers of history will pale at them.

Ernst von Bohnen, home on leave, was an "official father." He asked to have his "territory" extended, and to such a gallant member of the Kaiser's army—the news of his part in Edith Cavell's death had preceded him,—nothing must be refused. He went to the house where Vilma

Liebrecht lived with her aged father.

Honest, God-fearing Kurt Liebrecht did not understand these diabolical applications of the principle of *Kultur*. His Bible meant more to him than even the Kaiser's proclamation. To him, right was right and wrong was wrong. He had loved his wife honestly, and his child was sacred. When Conrad Boehm reached the home of his beloved, expecting to clasp her to his breast, he found old Liebrecht dead in defense of his daughter's honor, struck down by the hand of an "official father" who had obeyed the proclamation's instruction, "by force if necessary."

Vilma, little blue-eyed Vilma, was dying. By a mighty effort of will, the man to whom she was dearer than life itself restrained his grief and his lamentations until he had learned the truth.

"Vilma, little one, who has done this?"

At first no sound issued from her lips. Then he made out the words, "The *Herr Leutnant*. But the Kaiser willed it."

She was exhausted from the effort, and he thought her spirit had passed. But again, summoning all her forces, she spoke, so softly that he was obliged to put his ear close to her lips. "Goodbye, Conrad. I have always—loved you." Her head sank pitifully into the pillows—and was still.

Then, indeed, did Conrad Boehm give way to his grief. He suffered as only a strong man can suffer who has seen the love of his life, his flower of all the universe, despoiled and defiled.

"Vergiss-mein-nicht!" he sobbed. "It made me tremble to think of taking you in all honor,—and a beast has defiled you."

Raising himself to his full height, his face turned upward as if he would reach high heaven with his plea, Conrad Boehm, soldier of Germany, cried, *"Gott strafe den Kaiser!"*

The world has heard much of the tragedies of outraged womanhood. But it remained for Wilhelm II, the devil's greater brother, to invent the crime of outraged manhood, foisting it, not upon strangers and aliens, but upon the soldiers fighting and dying for him on a bloody battle-field. What must be Wilhelm's contempt for his own when he crams down his soldiers' throats the fact that their sweethearts, wives, their very mothers have been commanded to bear "official" children? When these men are released from the grim urge of battle, if the spirit of manhood in Germany is not dead, these contemned warriors, finding their wives and daughters despoiled on their hearthstones, will turn and rend the Arch Hun with their bare hands. "It will be better for him in that day if he had not been born."

Reverently Conrad drew the coverlet across the beloved face. He was now a rebel to the Kaiser. Never again should his hand be raised in defense of Kaiser or the Fatherland that sanctioned the spiritual destruction of its sons and daughters. Somewhere deep within him lurked the human desire to wreak vengeance on Ernst von Bohnen. But counsel whispered that that plan must await its opportunity. Just now, if discovered, he would be shot down like a dog for a deserter.

And a deserter he was—a deserter from the unnatural teachings and practices of *Kultur*. With a price on his head, and danger lying in

wait for him at every step, Conrad managed to escape into Denmark.

His plan was formed. He would go to his cousin Albert in America, renounce the country which had forsaken all ideals of decency and honor, and would become a citizen of that great republic which had advanced from being "a great experiment" to a tremendous triumphant reality.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW LAND AND A NEW HOPE

"Cousin Conrad, by all that's holy!" exclaimed Albert Brown, as a rather battered-looking figure entered the architect's office in lower New York where the young man was trying to convince a doubting world that he knew how its buildings should be made. "What brought you here?"

"All that's holy brought me here," answered Conrad, without a trace of a smile. "I have seen things——" He said no more, but his eyes held unutterable horrors.

"We have heard so," said Albert gravely. "We had hoped they were not true."

"They are all true," replied Conrad. But more definite than that he refused to be, and could not trust himself to speak of Vilma. "If you can get me work I shall be grateful. And I want to become a citizen. Your man Wilson was right."

Albert gave a whoop of joy. "Good for you, old top! But shake that German name." And so it was as Conrad Bayme that he applied for his citizenship papers.

Albert occasionally received enthusiastic letters from his old friend, George Downing, who had been one of the five per cent. of Americans with the first Canadian contingent. He wrote from a hospital "Somewhere in France."

"When is America coming in?" he asked. "Why should she be a slacker among the nations?"

And, truth to tell, the subject was beginning to be a sore one with Albert.

"That man Wilson——" said Conrad. "When is he going to wake up?"

"Don't let anybody fool you," replied Albert hotly. "He's awake, all right. He's slow, but he's sure. But he's an understudy to that original guy who said, 'Be sure you're right. Then go ahead.' He wants to have the rights of it all on our side when we do go in. And he wants to be able to prove it. That's the schoolmaster for you."

"Schoolmasters!" mused Conrad. "Again they are the deciding factor in the world's counsels. Nietzsche, Delbrück—— It's well for the nation when they are right, but bad for the nation counseled by school masters who have lost hold on God."

"Gee! Conrad, but you're a serious-minded chap."

"I am no longer a youth. True, I am twenty-five—just your own age—but I shall never think or act as a youth again. I have been face to face with the most grim realities a man ever had to bear—a man in whom all hope is dead. That is the Kaiser's work—that is the Germany of to-day, which has betrayed the former high ideals of its people. But don't let me be a damper on your spirits, and shame your generous hospitality. Come on, let's go see a ball game."

Never again by word or look did Conrad refer to the horrors through which he had passed. He

felt he had no right to inflict his bitter memories upon these kind American friends. But he seldom smiled. Kitty Blake's mother was the only one who seemed able to penetrate beneath the surface of his reserve. In the darkened corner of the veranda, sometimes in the evening, he would sit on the floor at her feet, while she talked cheerily of simple, pleasant things, and once when he suddenly caught her hand in his and carried it to his lips murmuring *"Mutterchen,"* she never told that his face was wet with tears.

Conrad tried to throw himself heart and soul into the life and spirit of the land of his adoption. He chose his political party and affiliated himself with it.

"Why don't you make speeches, and tell what you've been through?" Albert urged him. To all such requests Conrad shook his head.

"No, I've adopted your president along with your country," he said, smiling, "and he has asked us to be neutral. Little he knows what a hard job it is for a man like me, who knows what I know, but—I'll do the best I can. And I don't want to be classed with the wrong kind of soapbox orators."

However, at the president's critical reference to "out-and-out pacifists," he rejoiced, and when substantiated tales of German atrocities caused a wave of revulsion through the land, he thanked God for the vision and the idealism of a man who could say, as the president did in a ringing speech at Chicago, "We have been cried awake by these voices in the disturbed and reddened night, when fire sweeps sullenly from continent to continent; and it may be that in this red flame of light there

will rise again that ideal figure of America holding up her hand of hope and of guidance to the people of the world."

Here was a man of peace, a man passionately desiring the welfare not only of his own countrymen, but of the whole world, a man of long-suffering patience, but a man who when that patience had been too long insulted could lead his hosts to battle in mighty indignation.

The images of two men arose in Conrad's vision—one great in peace, the other mighty in war-making; one trying to conserve the rights of humanity, the other crushing them in his mailed hand; Wilson, the self-respecting representative of a self-respecting nation, and Wilhelm II, of the House of Hohenzollern, dominating war-lord of a cowed people.

Wilson or the Kaiser? To which did any honest man owe allegiance? Conrad knew that he had chosen wisely.

"Ever since we were born as a nation," Wilson had said, "we have undertaken to be the champions of humanity and the rights of men. Without that ideal there would be nothing that would distinguish America from her predecessors in the history of nations."

Conrad drew a deep breath. It was good to be alive, with a right to think his own thoughts. It was good to be a member of a nation of altruists, a nation of which each man and woman is a vital part. "The theory of government which I decline to subscribe to," had said that great man at Washington, "is that the vitality of the nation

comes out of the closeted councils where a few men determine the policy of the country." Truly, after the storm and stress, the heartbreak of Europe, it was good to be alive in free America!

CHAPTER VIII

A WEDDING IN KHAKI

CONRAD BAYME was jubilant when the United States declared war upon Germany! After all the protests and warnings against the *"Schrecklichkeit"* of ruthless submarine warfare and the denying of the rights of neutrals to travel upon the high seas, the inevitable had happened. Conrad was like a man released from prison. He knew now what it was he had wanted all the time. He wanted to fight, to be one of the first *Americans*—he raised his head proudly at the word—to give actual proof of the faith that was in him.

"Come on, then, if you feel that way about it," his cousin Albert said cheerfully, "we'll go down to the recruiting office together. But I should think, with all your information, you could be a lot of help as a spy."

"I shall be glad to lay whatever information I have before the authorities," answered Conrad, "but I've seen enough of espionage to last me a lifetime. No, this devil that the Imperial German government has raised within me can be downed by just one thing—and that is, war to the death with the power that has brought it into being. It's a case of being cured by a hair of the dog that bit you," he laughed. "No, seriously, Albert, I've had a taste of fighting like a Hun.

Now I want to fight like a white man."

"I have the honor," said Albert after they had been measured for their uniforms, "to invite you to a wedding. Consider this a gilt-edged invitation, since there isn't time to have any engraved."

"Has Kitty——?"

"Yes. I didn't have the heart, but she insisted. You're to be best man, and it will be strictly a khaki wedding."

It was true. Kitty had insisted.

"You know I love you, Kitty," Albert had said after he had taken his physical examination, and had been accepted. "You must always have known it. But going away like this—I haven't the right——"

"You haven't the right to do anything else, Albert Brown."

"But, Kitty darling, the risks are too great——"

"The risks are too great for me to permit you to go away without the love of a wife in your heart, and memories—— Oh, Albert!" she flew into his arms, and they clung together in mingled happiness and grief. Finally she released herself gently, and gave a happy little laugh.

"Besides, dear, you surely couldn't expect me to be an old maid. Do you mind if your bride wears one of last year's dresses? There may not be time to have one made—and we must economize."

"Say, I'll be walking on air. I shall not even see the dress. You know I never know what you have on. But are we doing the wise thing? I'm afraid for you, dear——"

"I'll be more afraid for myself if we don't," she answered stoutly. "There would be a loneliness in my heart that nothing could help. And as far as you're concerned, I want you to know that I'll 'Keep the home fires burning.' Besides, just think of the letters, chocolate, and socks you're going to get."

"Well, go easy on the socks and chocolate, if you like, so long as I get the letters. And don't forget poor Conrad. He'll be wanting some letters, too."

"Oh, don't worry about Conrad. Mother has already adopted him as her soldier son. He'll have fifty pounds of sweaters alone, I'm positive."

Albert and Conrad were assigned to a near-by camp, and were lucky enough to obtain leave together, so that the new citizen could be present at the wedding of his comrade-in-arms. It was a real war-wedding, without undue fuss and frills. Kitty, as she had indicated, wore a pretty white dress, simple and inexpensive, but the light in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks needed no further adornment.

On the arm of her soldier-bridegroom, greeting their little circle of guests in the old-fashioned parlor of her mother's home, she was just a happy American bride, her nature awakened to a new sense of responsibility by the serious purpose which now ruled the lives and hearts of the nation's patriots. The hour was a bitter one for Conrad. In his mind's eye he saw Vilma, his little "Forget-me-not," and the wreath of bridal flowers he had hoped to place on her flaxen hair. But Vilma, the true, pure soul of Vilma, walked in the pastures of God.

Oh, the glory of that day when, with their regiment, the two cousins, alien in birth but one in high purpose, marched down Fifth Avenue between crowds upon crowds of enthusiastic, cheering citizens, their souls aflame with the sacred fire of patriotism!

Albert and Kitty had said their good-byes, and now she turned a smiling, courageous face toward those marching thousands, watching for her young husband—her *man*. Suddenly—she caught sight of him, and smiled and waved as long as the marching ranks permitted him to see her. Then she broke down, and laying her head on her mother's shoulder, unashamed, before the multitude, let the tears have their way.

"Take me home," she pleaded like a tired child. "I don't want people to see me cry—they'll think I'm a slacker."

So while the bands were playing "Over There," and all the world was cheering the entrance of American troops into the actual struggle, the girl-bride crept wearily homeward, that no resolution be weakened, that no one's heart should feel sorrow for her tears, that her personal grief should be sunk in the larger sense of duty.

That night Kitty wrote her first letter to her soldier-husband, a letter of loving messages filled with the kind of cheer that puts spirit into a man, and gives him the heart and the will to fight for his country and the brave women at home.

CHAPTER IX

"THE YANKS ARE COMING!"

ON the transport that bore them away, the men joked about capturing Huns and helmets; joked about the camouflage of their convoy; joked about their own attacks of seasickness. But there was one man who did not joke. That was the man called Conrad Bayme, now returning to the land from which he had escaped as Conrad Boehm.

Meaning and grim purpose were in every set line on his face, young in years, but old in misery and determination. And his cousin Albert made no attempt to wipe away that cloud on his countenance, for he knew that behind it was an implacable hate, a desire for revenge that would not be denied.

"Where do we go from here, boys,
Where do we go from here?"

English rain, nor French mud, nor animal-cars for eight horses, destined for the transporting of forty men, could dampen the spirits of these Yankee lads.

"Just show us Fritzie!" they cried. "Let's get a good look at him. All the way over not a submarine worth mentioning, and now not a Hun in sight. Tough luck!"

For they were in a "quiet sector" at first—being gradually made familiar with the newer ways of the battle-field. They learned the intricacies

of trench warfare, the beauty—and the danger—of the flare-lights by which "Fritz" sees to send a rain of shells and shrapnel by night; they learned that delay in putting on a gas mask is deadly. They learned how to use the bayonet, and to use it quick and well, lest worse than death befall.

All his information Conrad had promptly placed in the hands of his superiors. Enlisting as a private, he was soon raised to the rank of "top sergeant." He could have had a commission, but the grim business to which he had set his purpose brooked of no delay. Conrad Bayme was praying—praying with the sincerity learned at his mother's knee and the inflexible singleness of purpose of a madman, that his enemy should be delivered into his hands, that his strength and skill should be pitted against that of Ernst von Bohnen. He prayed that no Allied bullet should find its target in the monster's body, robbing him of his revenge.

Suddenly he realized that there was a certain grim beauty about his having left the hordes of the Kaiser to battle for right and freedom, and (half-mad, if you will) he demanded of the Most High God a payment. In that moment he felt he had a right to make terms with his Creator.

"Give him into my hands!" he cried, his gaze seeking the leaden sky. And it seemed to him that the Lord of Hosts made answer,—had sent a message straight to his soul. Henceforth, Conrad Bayme was a happy man. He sought dangers, believing that he led a charmed life, as indeed it seemed. He was convinced that he should not die until Ernst von Bohnen, the hated "*Herr Leutnant*" of Brussels, had paid the penalty of his crimes with death.

Then came the day when the Yankee "doughboys" went wild with joy over the order for a picked number of Americans to join the French, and bolster up an Allied attack. Gallantly they did their duty, acquitting themselves nobly as soldiers and as men. Skilfully were the hand grenades thrown, just soon enough, and not too soon, so that the "Boches" should not have time to hurl them back in time to do damage to the Allied ranks.

Deftly, snappily went the bayonet work, and on rushed the "doughboys" with a will. Such sheer young gladness in battle had never been known before on any fighting front. The gaiety of the Americans was refreshing to their more seasoned French and English comrades. The Yankees had not been saddened by large numbers of their own men slain, their homes burned and pillaged, their wives and children preys to the bestial Hun. Not yet were they fighting the desperate battle for their own.

"We are fighting," the great patriot in Washington had said, "for the liberty, self-government and the undictated development of all peoples, and every feature of the settlement that concludes this war must be conceived and executed for that purpose."

Day after day Conrad Bayme watched and listened for news of Ernst von Bohnen, praying that the Prussian's regiment might be opposed to the forces of which he was a part. This was the easier for him to accomplish since for conspicuous bravery, as well as for his understanding of the German language, he had been made a liaison officer.

CHAPTER X

JUSTICE IS DONE

AND at last the hoped-for happened. The foe, suffering heavy reverses, had called up reinforcements, and Ernest von Bohnen's regiment lay entrenched before the little French town, sending forth, on that glorious autumn day, the shell-fire of "morning hate" so dear to the heart of the Prussian.

"God, Thou has redeemed Thy pledge," breathed Conrad. "Thou hast delivered Thine enemy and mine into my hands." He did not doubt for a moment that the chances of battle would give him the opportunity he craved. And perhaps since great faith is its own surest road to fulfillment, the chance came!

Conrad had delivered his message to his commanding officer, and had begun to retrace his steps, threading his way past his fellows through the trenches, when following their own barrage fire, a party of "Boches" advanced. Ernst von Bohnen was leading a detachment of them. Conrad stopped short in his journey back to the lines. This was his fight! Some one else might carry messages— He might be shot for disobeying orders—well, let them shoot and welcome. He should have had his revenge.

Over the top they went with a yell—those young American "huskies." And over the top

went Conrad Bayme, every lithe inch of him eager for the encounter, his eyes on the man who was to feel the cold steel of his bayonet, clear through his dirty flesh. To the right and left of Conrad his comrades, with Albert, his cousin, among them, were grappling hand to hand with the foe, despatching them speedily, or, just as speedily falling victim to them. A few young Teutons Conrad thrust impatiently aside. When they interfered with him, or blocked his progress toward von Bohnen he killed them. But he did not deviate by so much as a hair's breadth from the path to his goal.

The *"Herr Leutnant"* suddenly realized himself to be the objective of this long-limbed Yankee, and stood ready to deal death to the impudent hound. Then, as he looked full into Conrad's eyes, he knew him for a German, and recognized him as the sweetheart of the girl he had despoiled. In one fear-strangled moment the events of years raced across his brain, as a drowning man remembers all the events of his life. He saw again the wall of St. Gilles prison in Brussels, where noble Edith Cavell's dead body had received insult at his hand; he saw flaxen-haired Vilma Liebrecht, pleading piteously, and her stern old father come forth to receive his death. In Conrad's eyes he read his death sentence, and knew that from that sentence there would be no appeal. One last effort he made, before his craven soul accepted the impending disaster.

"Kamerad!" shouted Ernst von Bohnen.

"Ah-h!" breathed Conrad, in disgust—and ran him through.

His task fulfilled, his mission ended, Conrad

was as one dazed, taking little thought for his own life. He offered no resistance to the German sergeant who shot him down—seemed not to see him approaching. His comrades recovered his body —it was Albert who found him lying wounded.

"Vergiss-mein-nicht!" he murmured, as he lay with his face to the sky. "Little Vilmo! I'm coming!"

Conrad Bayme, true-hearted American and brave warrior, had killed the man, but what of the master? What of that Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, whose base commands have thrust Germany so far below the level of mankind that she will rise with the utmost difficulty—if, indeed, she ever rises? What of the Kaiser?

Conrad Bayme lies dead, but Albert Brown and his gallant comrades, both of America and of her Allies, are fighting on, not in a spirit of revenge for a private grief, but reverently, with bull-dog determination to win, for the high cause of humanity and decency.

If that victory is not won, the earth, now, due to Prussian ambition, over a wide territory a shambles, will be given over to a rule that laughs at woman's purity and man's honor, and that breeds little children simply to make them the pawns in the great game he wishes to play with the Universe. Until he and his kind are forever vanquished, the struggle must go on, and each man, in his inmost heart, must make the choice between the powers of Darkness and the powers of Light—must choose between the ideals of Wilson and the Kaiser.

THE END

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